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DEPARTMENT PASS TO USTR - D. VETTER
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ITALY TO ABSTAIN IN EU VOTE ON "HERCULEX" GM CORN
APPROVAL

REF: A. STATE 86332

[1](#)B. ROME 1232

[1](#)1. (U) On June 22, Minister Counselor for Agricultural Affairs delivered Ref A points on EU approval for a biotech corn variety, "Herculex Root Worm," for feed and food purposes to Dr. Romano Marabelli, Ministry of Health Director General for Animal and Human Health. Marabelli confirmed that, as reported in Ref B, Italy would abstain in the June 25th vote.

[1](#)2. (U) Although it resulted in the referral of Herculex's approval to the EU Council, we note that Italy's decision to abstain is an improvement over its previous long established practice of voting against the introduction of biotech products into the EU market regardless of any merit or positive assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a telephone conversation with AgMinCoun on the morning of June 25, Marabelli indicated Italy's original intent was to vote "yes" in Brussels. Marabelli said the decision to abstain was driven by pressures brought to bear by the Greens and some farmer and consumer organizations following EU approval of an adventitious presence level for GM content in organic foods of 0.9 percent. Marabelli claimed Italy would have voted to approve Herculex if Italy's abstention would have led to a blocking majority.
Spogli